DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 900 CG 022 414

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TITLE The Concept of Balance: A Futuristic Perspective of Student Development.
PUB DATE Mar 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (New Orleans, LA, March 14-17, 1990).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - General (020) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *School Personnel; *Student Development; Student Needs

ABSTRACT

This document concerns the need for college and university student affairs professionals to prepare for the 21st century. It asserts that an understanding of the concept of balance can help student affairs professionals gain insight into how individual students use the academic process and the college experience for beneficial growth and development. Four presentations are included. "Student Development and the Practitioner" by Dan Abrahamowicz reviews some of the literature and research in the area of student affairs and concludes that, for the practitioner, the concept of balance reflects an equilibrium between theory and practice and between institutional ecology and structure and student needs. "Balance--A Practitioner's Experience" by Phil Whitner discusses his experiences as a student development professional. Focusing on his experiences with student-athletes, his concludes that the student's ability to determine, acquire, and balance a specific to fulfill a need deficit is an important step toward that student's development. "Balance--Departmental Perspective" by Don Sanz presents a general basic outline for college and university counseling centers. The outline includes sections on traditional versus non-traditional service delivery systems, future institutional concerns, and counseling center response for the future. "Balance--Divisional Perspective" by David McIntire identifies five critical areas that are instrumental in student development: staffing, operations, philosophy, modeling, and survival. Student affairs professionals are advised to attend to these critical areas. (NB)

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ED312900

THE CONCEPT OF BALANCE

A Futuristic Perspective of Student Development

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and

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A paper presented at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) annual conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 14-17, 1990.

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As college and university student affairs professionals gear up for the 21st century they need to be aware of: 1) the composition of their campus population; 2) what services this population will need; and 3) how to best provide these services while minimizing resources and maximizing educational opportunities. An understanding of the concept of balance can aid student affairs professionals to gain insight into how individual students utilize the academic process and the college experience for beneficial growth and development while attaining a positive higher education outcome.

Student Development and the Practitioner

Dr. Dan Abrahamowicz
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The value of student development theory for student affairs professionals seems to be, at best, marginal. Despite the proliferation of developmental theories and the general acceptance

of student development as fundamental to student affairs work, many professionals (Stamatakos and Rogers, 1984) have concluded that the profession is still lacking a coherent, consistent philosophy. In addition, a dilemma for the practitioner is that the clarity of meticulously developed theory fades to ambiguity in actual practice. For example, Bloland (1986a, 1986b) noted that some of the shortcomings in student affairs practice is rooted in attempts to force practice from inaccessible and non-implemented theories.

Such action has created a dilemma which assumes urgent proportions as student affairs professionals prepare for the 21st century. Foreign students, transfer students, older students, student athletes, and other populations once taken for granted, or virtually ignored, have become pools of populations increasing in significance to institutions of higher education. Rather than serving a few, the colleges and universities of the future will serve the mass. The introspective luxury associated with fitting square pegged practice into round holed theory is no longer available to student affairs professionals. A report by the study panel of the Education Commission of the States (1986) indicated that state leaders have become increasingly outspoken about matters that were once left to college and university professionals. These state leaders are asking fundamental questions about student preparation for college, student participation in college, and graduate preparation for a changing society. State leaders are calling for tangible evidence that college does make a difference.

Considering the vast scope and diversity of the higher

education enterprise of the future, what role is there for student development - the so called "cardinal thesis" of the student personnel profession? Theories of student development have attempted to address the impact of the college experience on the personal development of students with little or no success. With few or no rules or guidelines, what meaning does this have for student affairs professionals, especially in light of the new demands and the pluralism of the 1990s and the 21st century?

To be accountable for student development and other positive student outcomes and to assist in providing tangible evidence, the student affairs professional must consider both what the institution offers and what students do with these offerings. Student affairs professionals must not only attend to the managerial requirements of their occupations, but they must also attend to the developmental aspects and needs of their students. To accomplish these tasks, student affairs professionals must be instrumental in striking a positive interactive balance between student and institution. To strike a positive interactive balance an eclectic approach to student development that aids students in achieving balance in their own lives must be implemented.

The report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education (Study Group ..., 1984) asserted that perhaps the most important condition for improving undergraduate education is student involvement. Involvement was defined as how much time, energy, and effort students devote to the learning process. The more involved students become the greater their growth and

achievement, their satisfaction, and their persistence. Additionally, the Study Group noted that educators have to compete with other forces which operate in a student's life, such as family, friends, and jobs, for a share of the student's time and energy. The greater these other forces, the less time and energy students have to devote to their educational development. Educators can aid students, according to the Study Group, "...by suggesting and providing significant opportunities for trade-offs. One set of trade-offs involves the transference of 'discretionary' activities to campus" (p.38).

A perspective of student involvement, coupled with adjusting the campus ecology and the campus structures, would encourage the immersion of students into the total college experience on an individual, as needed, basis. The student's immersion would permit student affairs professionals to demonstrate their effectiveness in practicing student development while allowing them to provide tangible evidence of the positive outcomes of higher education.

The involvement so prominently mentioned in the Study Group report (Study Group ..., 1984) stems from Alexander Astin's (1984) work in prescribing a developmental theory for higher education. Astin described his theory as appealing because 1) it is simple, not relying on boxes and arrows for explanation; 2) it explains the empirical knowledge of environmental influences on student development; 3) it embraces principles from psychoanalysis and learning theory; and 4) it can be used by researchers and by student affairs practitioners. The theory comfortably takes its place beside other student development theories and is easily

translated into actual practice. Astin viewed his theory as a unifying construct that may begin to focus the energies of all institutional personnel on a common objective.

Astin's involvement theory has applications in policy development, service delivery, programming, and research. For example, one research study (Abrahamowicz, 1988) has indicated that involvement in student organizations has a positive relationship with the student's satisfaction, perceptions of gains, and overall investment of time and energy in the academic process. This type of data is useful in developing institutional strategies for retention and demonstrating the connection and the impact of how involvement in various campus activities is related to student development in the areas postulated by Chickering (1969), Perry (1970) and others.

Beryl (1986) believes that student affairs professionals have developed a framework that has been based on differing interpretations of student development. A strategy that utilizes involvement theory as a starting point and then adjusts the campus ecology and structures within the framework of various student development theories would keep student affairs professionals true to their principles, while effectively attending to institutional and societal demands. Such a strategy would also address the question raised by Bloland (1986a, 1986b) as to how student development concepts can be employed and measured when higher education evaluation criteria are primarily related to managerial performance.

Balance

For the practitioner, the concept of balance reflects an equilibrium between theory and practice and between institutional ecology and structure and student needs. The concept raises the possibility that student development will transcend its role as a conceptually useful but nonfunctional paradigm. Ultimately, the concept of balance enables students to take that which the institution offers to optimize their college experience.

For college students the concept of balance means that each student must individually make the necessary adjustments and adaptations to optimize their academic and college experiences. Balance in this sense is a phenomenon whereby individuals assimilate and incorporate new information and experiences in order to satisfy existing need deficits so as to pursue a state of homeostasis. Balance is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It is dynamic, active and continuous. It is personal. Balance is a state of being -- individuals move through disequilibrium seeking and utilizing all known and all available resources in search of tranquility.

Balance -- A Practitioners Experience

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As a mental health professional at an institution of higher learning, I would like to state that during the past few years my beliefs, notions, and perceptions of student development have been

greatly altered. The reason for this shift was that as an on-line worker I became very personally involved with the students.

There are two extremely effective methods of getting to know and becoming familiar with another individual. The first is through private, personal, and confidential in-depth interviews. The second is by observation. As a counselor, who also provided and coordinated out-reach programs and groups, I had the luxury of utilizing both of these methods extensively while working at the University Counseling Center. The process of becoming more familiar and getting to really know the general student population at the University influenced the gradual shift of my beliefs, notions, and perceptions.

The shift began a few years ago when I was intently involved with a specific university student population. The population had been identified as needing assistance because, in general, they were considered to be educationally unprepared for the rigors of higher education academics. After providing study skills information to student athletes for about two years, I found that I was involved with a student population that had to bare the mythical burden of being labeled dumb. They were stereotyped.

I did not find groups of dumb-jocks. What I found was a group of young, bright, sensitive, and scared individuals. Some of the student athletes needed study skills. Some needed academic help. Some needed to know how and where to locate resources, while others needed to know how to effectively manage their time and environment. Some student athletes needed assistance with normal human development issues, while others did not. What soon became

apparent was that a stereotyped university student population that was identified as being academically different was in reality very similar to the general student population.

As my work with student athletes decreased in intensity, my counseling responsibilities with the general student population increased. As time passed, it became evident that the needs of the student athletes and the needs of the general student population almost mirrored each other. What were these needs? To truthfully answer this question, you need to ask each student.

When seeking individual personal needs, the uniqueness of each and every person becomes extremely evident. In general, I found that most students were seeking to learn what it takes to earn a letter grade of an A, a B, or an F. They were seeking opportunities to learn to become more responsible. To take care of themselves. I observed maturity unfolding, as well as attitudinal changes. I witnessed adjustments and adaptations to new and different environments as students struggled with their academic, social, and personal lives.

For me, observing this phenomenon raised the question "What is a college education?" Discounting the obvious of course content, I asked myself, "Isn't education learning to figure out and solve problems?" "Isn't education learning and developing coping skills and strategies?" "Isn't education learning how to take care of yourself?" "Isn't education learning to be responsible?" The student generally discusses, addresses, or learns these skills in the classroom. They then inductively transfer and develop these skills either on campus or in the work-a-day world. The questions

of "How much?" and to "What degree?" a student needs a specific to address a deficit is totally dependent upon each individual student. The student's ability to determine, acquire, and balance a specific to fulfill a need deficit is an important step toward that student's development.

Balance -- Departmental Perspective

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Departments that are organizationally located within the Division of Student Affairs have to be sensitive to the needs of the 21st century's new, changing, and diverse population. As resources shrink and the expertise of student affairs professionals increases, more request and demands will be made from the general community population for services that were once restricted and considered only for students. Departments that provide student services at colleges and universities will need to take a proactive approach toward the delivery of services instead of a reactive approach. Departments that have traditionally provided curative services will need to include preventive measures and programs. The Departments that attend to the student's needs and deficits will be the Departments that significantly enhance the attractiveness, the reputation, and the viability of the Divisions they represents.

The following is a suggested general basic outline for college

and university Counseling Centers.

I. Traditional vs. Non-traditional Service Delivery Systems
   - A. Curative Services
   - B. Developmental Services
   - C. Preventive Services

II. Future Institutional Concerns
   - A. Crisis and Other Severe Problems
   - B. Changing Student Population
     1. Minorities (Racial & Cultural)
     2. Non-Traditional Students
     3. Underprepared Students
     4. Student Athletes
     5. Freshmen
   - C. Retention
   - D. Community Needs, Request and Demands

III. Counseling Center Response for the Future
   - A. Curative Within Limits
   - B. Focus on Developmental
   - C. Environmental Prevention
   - D. Diversity and Expertise of Staff

Balance -- Divisional Perspective

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As the world continues to move toward a single pluralistic society, institutions of higher education will need to be at the vanguard of reality. Reality is that student affairs professionals are not the most important people in a college student's life. However, student affairs professionals do play an important role in a student's college experience and the overall academic process. The colleges and universities that will be the educational leaders during the 21st century will be institutions that address and balance the needs of their student populations. The student populations will be diverse and pluralistic. Their needs will be varied and different. The institutions of the future and at the forefront will be the institutions that address and attend to five critical areas that are instrumental in student development. The areas are:

1 - staffing

2 - operations

3 - philosophy

4 - modeling

5 - survival

The student affairs professionals who attend to these critical areas of student development will be the Divisions of Student Affairs who make their educational institution more attractive and more accessible for all students while fostering positive higher education outcomes.

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